United Nations Secretary-General Selection: The Role of the Secretary-General in Russia vs the West

David Clark, Russia Foundation
Steven Erlanger, The New York Times
Natalie Samarasinghe, United Nations Association – UK

Chair: Lord Hannay of Chiswick

24 May 2016
UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL SELECTION

**EVENT:** ‘United Nations Secretary-General Selection: The Role of the Secretary-General in Russia vs the West’

**TIME:** 18:00 - 19:00, Tuesday 24th May 2016

**VENUE:** Committee Room 3A, House of Lords, Houses of Parliament, SW1A 0PW

**SPEAKERS:**
- David Clark, Chairman of the Russia Foundation
- Steven Erlanger, London Bureau Chief of The New York Times
- Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director of the United Nations Association – UK

**CHAIR:** Lord Hannay of Chiswick

Later this year, the United Nations will elect a new Secretary-General. The selection process is already underway, with each of the current eight candidates having faced hearings in New York in April. Whoever is elected, a pressing issue that the new leader will need to address is the UN’s role in international affairs. Given the current tensions between Russia and the West over the former’s aggressions toward Ukraine, this is a pertinent point. With several of the candidates coming from Eastern Europe, these individuals have unique perspectives about the tensions – perspectives that may mean they are best placed to succeed Ban Ki-Moon as Secretary-General.

On 24th May by the kind invitation of Lord Hannay of Chiswick, The Henry Jackson Society hosted an event dedicated to the topic of the upcoming United Nations Secretary-General elections. The guests had a chance to listen to a discussion by: David Clark, Chairman of the Russia Foundation and a Senior Research Fellow at the Federal Trust; Steven Erlanger, London Bureau Chief of The New York Times; and, Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director of the United Nations Association.
Event Summary

- The United Nations Secretary-General selection process has traditionally taken place almost completely behind closed doors - with only members of the Security Council making the selections. This time around, things are different. For the first time, the full list of Secretary-General candidates has been known across the UN system and by the global public as well, renewing both interest in the United Nations and hope for its future work.

- The UN currently faces an immense set of challenges, including: the migration crisis; the Zika virus; the cutting of funding to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; and, increasing pressure to organise effective peace-keeping missions. If the current tension between Russia and the West is added, the new Secretary-General will need to have a stronger public presence to improve the image of the UN. In addition, the ability of the new Secretary-General to work effectively behind the scenes and mediate potential future conflicts within the Security Council will be of key importance.

- By tradition, the UN operates an informal system of regional ‘rotation’ when it comes to choosing its next Secretary-General. This time around, it is deemed to be the turn of Eastern Europe. Given global tensions that exist between Russia and the West, a suitable and qualified candidate from Eastern Europe might allow smoother functioning of the UN, in particular in mediating often competing interests in the Security Council.

- The UN Security Council is one of the key pillars on which Russia’s perceived ‘great power’ status rests. It is often thought that Russia is obstructing the work of Security Council through the exertion of its power of veto, but the UN could not function without Russian support. The new UN Secretary-General, whether from Eastern Europe or elsewhere, will need to play an active role in de-escalating current tensions in Ukraine, Syria, South China Sea and other hotspots of the world.
Lord Hannay of Chiswick:

... We have three speakers, which is excellent. I’d just like to say a few words to kind of set the context for today’s discussion ‘round this table. The present secretary-general’s job, I expect you know, ends in December of this year. Ban Ki-Moon has had two terms, and he’s not standing for re-election. The new secretary-general selection process is well underway now; the choice I suspect will be made in September but more likely it might be October, by the general assembly on the basis of a proposal from the Security Council. Now, the method of choosing a secretary general has become—over the years—a bit contentious. Rightly so, in my view, because there’s plenty wrong with it. And it’s ripe for reform. The issues that arise in that context, which I’m sure Natalie will say more when she speaks, are the issue of the relative difference between the security council and the general assembly where the general assembly at the moment only gets one name, which can be rejected which has been perhaps done, and they would like more names and have the choice left to them—if you wish to have a prediction from me, who has no role in this matter whatsoever, we will proceed.

There is the issue of regional pre-emption which has become very prominent in the UN over the years and which has led to not particularly desirable consequences—that is to say a system whereby you not only rotate the office, which up to a point you have to do, as you can’t have all from one region or another, but you rotate it pre-emptively, so to say you don’t really pay attention to any candidates from anywhere except the region which thinks it’s its next turn. That means that you automatically rule out about ¾ or more of the world’s population every time which is not really I think a clever way to do things. You can achieve rotation without regional pre-emption. You have the issue of whether it would not be better for a Secretary-General to be appointed for one, non-renewable 7-year term rather than the present convention which is two five-year terms, but which leads to a lot of jockeying to get a second term. You get the gender issue; there have been no women secretaries-general so far, and there has been a lot of pressure justified in my view to give a really fair run to any women candidates of whom there are several. There’s a lack of transparency, so that in the past candidates have tried to go round the capitals, particularly the capitals of the five permanent members of the Security Council and tell each one what they wanted to hear, even though what they were saying was mutually contradictory. And that has not tended to produce very good results.

Now, so far in the process, the most progress has been made on transparency, where Natalie and her UN association which I used to chair years ago has played a remarkable role in increasing that. And there will be in London on the third of June what you could call a (inaudible) in which quite a lot of the candidates will appear and talk, but there has already been a hustings meeting in New York. And now there will probably be more. That I think is a big plus, because it means that we’ll have something closer to the sort of mandate that someone who is elected to an office in the democratic state has to say what they have been trying to do before they were appointed, and if they’re then appointed after that—well, you can’t complain if they then say that they’re going to do what they were going to try to do. That has not happened in the past, and if it were to happen this time it would be very good indeed. Whether regional pre-emption will be successfully challenged this time, I don’t know, but I think it probably could be, because the East Europeans who say it’s their turn (and it’s true, they have never held the post) are something of a figment of the imagination because
they were constructed to provide a constituency in which the Soviet Union ruled all. And now the Soviet Union does not exist and the Russians and East Europeans are rather an odd collection because not all are in the European Union or aspire to be so. Anyway, some of their candidates are saying it’s “their turn” while others, the wiser amongst them in my view, are saying “I’m the best, so please choose me” which is, I think, a better argument. We do have to be careful on this gender issue, because we mustn’t slide into gender pre-emption any more than we are into regional pre-emption — so that is a consideration, although I say that if one of the women candidates now proves to be rather good, I would be astonished if they did not get chosen.

The second leg of our discussion is the role of our next potential secretary-general who will take office on the first of January in alleviating what you could call the quasi-Cold War at the UN between Russia and the West. It’s not a full-bloodied Cold War, but it did prevent any UN role in the situation in Crimea and Ukraine; it has crippled efforts to intervene in the Syrian Civil War, so it is highly desirable (though not necessarily achievable) to soften that confrontation if the UN is to play a full role of peacekeeping in international politics. So I think David Clark will start, Chair of the Russia Foundation, and who studies Russia’s relationships to the rest of the world, and what’s going on in Russia—and previously a special advisor to Robin Cooke, when I knew him. David? Second, Steven Erlanger, who’s been bureau chief at the New York Times pretty much everywhere in the world—Paris, Berlin, (not the UN!) Jerusalem, London, and he’s had a lot of experience with Eastern Europe and the Middle East and he has served in Moscow. And Natalie Samarasinghe on my right who’s Executive director of the UN association, a board I chaired some years ago, and who has played a leading role in a campaign called 1 for 7 Billion, which is about how to improve the selection process for the UN Secretary-General. So they will talk to these two parallel subjects of the selection process and how the new Secretary-General might improve the capacity of the United Nations to handle issues which had been blocked in the last few years. David.

David Clark:

Thank you very much. And, first of all, do I need to put the microphone on or can you all hear me ok? (Inaudible) Ok. Let’s just give people a moment to settle down. I think the first thing to say is that the UN—if we’re to talk about Russia’s role in this process of selection—that the first thing to say is that the UN is very important to Russia. Membership of the Security Council was I think one of the most important factors that allowed Russia to maintain its great power status after the fall of the Soviet Union. The others being I think the energy deposits, and the final being the holdings of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. Which for many reasons made it an indispensable partner, and still makes it an indispensable partner in arms control discussions. And those few things together I think make a floor that prevent Russian power declining as it did during the 1990s from the basis of its current recovery. And that’s why the Russian foreign policy doctrine describes the UN as “the principal organization holding International Relations as one of its top priorities. It should be also said at this time that when there is a widespread notion (including in the West unfortunately) that the West somehow deliberately tried to undermine Russia, that Russia retained its seat on the Security Council because the West decided that Russia could inherit the Soviet Union’s status, though the UN charter says quite specifically that the seat belongs to the Soviet Union. So, the Soviet Union ceases to exist, but because the West wanted Russia to inherit not only the rights of the Soviet Union but the obligations of the Soviet Union under arms control treaties and that sort of thing, they decided that it would be in their interest and Russia’s interest to become the successor state to the Soviet Union, and therefore a permanent veto-
wielding member of the Security Council. And the West could have taken a very different view. If it wanted to undermine Russia, it could have taken a very different view, and didn’t.

It should also be said that Russia’s very important to the UN. Because of that and because Russia is a big important country that has a lot of assets, considerable territory, and a large population and other reasons. The UN system can’t work as it was designed to do without Russia’s support and cooperation. We’ve seen that in the past, during the Soviet era, and we see it again today, I think. The UN can’t take big decisions on things like the Secretary-General unless Russia is on board. And it’s particularly important this year, I think as Lord Hannay pointed out, because there is the argument that the Eastern European group, the only group to have never had the job, should get it this time. The regions are, of course, artificially designed; they’re a product of the Cold War period and the early Cold War origins of the United Nations. And during that time, Eastern Europe was side-lined, because all the states in that region were satellites of the Soviet Union, especially after Tito’s break with Moscow over Yugoslavia. And after the Cold War, Africa and Asia have taken precedence, as big and vocal regions demanding to have the top job. So is it now time for Eastern Europe to have the job? Russia interestingly thinks it is, as it has made it plain that the job should go to a candidate from Eastern Europe; Russia might have been expected to take a different view in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis and its strange relations with many different countries in the region; and clearly many countries in the region are not capable of producing a candidate acceptable to Russia. Names from the Baltic States and Poland and others have been suggested but they’re non-runners, really, because of the nature of their relationship with Russia. So the number of states capable of producing a candidate acceptable to Russia is much smaller than it otherwise looks like. So why has Russia decided to take this position in support of Eastern Europe’s claim on the principle of rotation? I think the narrow interpretation is that Russia wants to begin to rebuild relationships with some of its neighbours and sees an interest in playing the role of a team player, a regional team player as a way of rebuilding its relations. It may also feel that a candidate from the region would have a better understanding of Russian sensitivities provided they were the right sort of candidates, and not some of the candidates who—well, David see as a very anti-Russian position, or what I would say is a hawkish position on Russia and the Ukraine crisis. Or perhaps Russia wants the UN to be more engaged in European affairs as an honest broker. The UN was notable in its absence from the Ukraine crisis; didn’t play any kind of role really I think; it was left to informal processes like (inaudible) to take the main role; perhaps in supporting an Eastern European candidate, Russia believes that the UN should have more of a role in mediating European affairs, particularly where there are points of tension. If so, it could be an optimistic sign that Russia wants to find a way of calming the situation in Europe and creating a diplomatic track that would scale back from some of the more militaristic positions that it’s taken in the last couple of years.

The question is of whether regional rotation should stand. My answer is a conditional yes, and I’ll come onto the conditions shortly. My reasons for saying yes are that the UN’s legitimacy as a world body, and a genuine world body, depends on it representing the whole planet. The very strong claims made by Asia and Africa after what this was, exclusion from the job, were met with a response from the UN system and candidates from those regions were appointed. Now, the Eastern European group doesn’t have the same kind of collective identity that, and certainly not the kind of collective influence that, China exerts on behalf of Asia, for example, when Ban Ki-Moon was appointed. But that’s certainly not a reason for it to be overlooked; it’s never had the job, so there’s a strong case for looking seriously at their candidates. I think it would be an important recognition of how far the region has travelled, politically and economically over the last quarter of a century, and I think it would end the Cold War anomaly by which the region was not trusted to have the
job. It’s in a very different place now, totally different circumstances—sort of draw a line on one of the last remaining aspects of the Cold War that hasn’t really had closure. The condition, of course, is that Eastern Europe (like any other region that wants the job) has to produce a candidate of considerable quality. The principle of regional rotation can’t trump every other consideration, and the need of the UN to have effective leadership will always take precedence—quite rightly.

And there are other considerations as well. Many people, like myself, take the view that it’s time for a woman to get the job. And I think that it’s unacceptable, after 70 years of the UN’s existence, that only men have held the job, especially when you think about the importance of women’s empowerment to delivering UN development to things like human rights, security, etc. And second consideration, which is more accepted I guess, is that the candidate must be an experienced diplomat capable of handling the role, preferably with a background of the United Nations, certainly many of the people appointed in the past have had a background in the UN. And I think not a former prime minister or head of state. Some of the candidates who are emerging, like Helen Clark, have been prime ministers in the past. The P5 [Permanent Five – Ed.] have always taken the view that they want someone more “secretary” than “general”. They don’t want someone who considers themselves to be a peer to the leaders sitting around the world security table, they want someone who is going to be a servant of the council, not someone who’s going to try and accumulate power and authority for themselves. So, generally, the Security Council prefers to have someone who has been a foreign minister for example, or head of a UN agency, or some other senior minister. And thankfully in Europe I think there are many good candidates in the fray—not just from Eastern Europe, actually, the regional pre-emption hasn’t seemed to stop formal nomination from other parts of the world. There are ten formally nominated at last count, unless there have been more in the last day or two that I haven’t noticed. Seven of them are from Eastern Europe. Of the ones that have been nominated I think stand out are Danilo Turk from Slovenia, who is a former President of the Security Council, Irina Bokova, the current head of UNESCO, and Vesna Pusic, the foreign minister of Croatia. In many aspects these people fit the profiles of successful candidates for the job and show that Eastern Europe is capable of producing candidates of the right quality. In conclusion, I will say very quickly that I think this will be one of the most consequential decisions taken this year, and also an important indication of the states of relations between leading powers at a time of tension, as we have referred to what is kind of called an incipient Cold War, with the danger of becoming a Cold War if it carries along its current trajectory. Will the appointment of a new secretary-general become a political football, the way that the reappointment of Tripoli did in the 1950s with huge damage to the UN system, which persisted for a long time afterward? Or will they agree on a candidate capable of mediating between them? And finally, a big question for me is whether Russia would use the capability of its veto to insist on a candidate from Eastern Europe, in the way that China did in 2006 when Ban Ki-Moon was appointed, in insisting on a candidate from Asia? These are very interesting questions and this year I think will provide a preliminary answer to them.

Lord Hannay:

Yes, well, of course, China did veto (inaudible) several times, which was a more violent way of doing—they didn’t have to use a veto to do—when Ban was appointed. Right. Steven?
Steven Erlanger:

First of all, thank you, Lord Hannay, and it’s a pleasure to be here. One of the things I did do in my life—I was the chief diplomatic correspondent in Washington, and this was during the Boutros Boutros-Gahli Presidency/Secretary-General-ship. And I had a great lesson in how it all worked which I will share with you briefly; more at risk for a secretary of state (inaudible) who became National Security advisor. His (inaudible), I think would be the right word, and I was going into the (inaudible) one day to talk to Jim Steinberg who was head of policy planning and Jim said “no no, we can talk later but we have to go see (inaudible)” and I said okay, and he said “we’re going to go in to see Christopher, but I have to prepare you that what’s coming out is (inaudible) and we go to see Christopher, who was a lovely man. Very shy, but very lovely and he sat me down and explained that the United States was going to kill off Boutros Boutros-Gahli and make sure Kofi Annan became secretary-general. And that’s kind of how it worked. And I said to myself “ah, I know, this is how Washington works, too!” and it was a scoop of a not-so-impressive kind, but it was a front-page leader for the New York Times because of this big shock and my UN bureau chief was furious with me because I had been given the leak. And they were worried that if they gave it to her, she would leak it (chuckles). And the only degree of self-respect I felt I had as I managed to track down Boutros Boutros-Gahli who was I think in Egypt at the time and in time for our story got his furious comments into the same newspaper article. But that’s basically the way it worked. The US basically decided, much the same way that it decides who the next secretary-general is going to be. You know, there’s this talk about consultation and so on and so on—but what will be fascinating this time, I think, is who’s prepared to use their veto this time, because I think it’s quite clear that this Russia is not the Russia of five years ago. I’m not just talking about Ukraine; it’s revanchist, it has a real interest on undermining—on that we can agree—the post-Cold War order, because it believes that it was unfairly imposed upon when it was we—at some point made the comparison to Germany in 1918 in the sense of somehow stabbed in the back and taken advantage of, and we leapt on them when they were weak, and they don’t accept Versailles, and they’ve done all that they’ve done all that they can to come back.

Now, that’s a little extreme but there’s something to it. The one part of the post-Cold War order they don’t want to play with is their seat on the Security Council. That they will defend. So it will be very interesting to me—to me, the great drama will be that, how the Security Council works it out, no matter how many little interviews all these candidates have. And I’ve been very struck—and I agree with you, there are some very good candidates here—and I’ve been struck by a couple of them. One is Bokova, who I knew pretty well in Paris when she was running UNESCO, and she was there when the Americans pulled their funding out (inaudible, background coughing) that they had forgotten had been passed about the recognition of Palestine, and she coped quite well with such a cut—22%, which is what the Americans contribute to any UN agency. But she was perceived, rightly or wrongly, and this infuriates her as the Russian candidate—that is, the favoured candidate of Russia, partly because her father was a red prince; he ran the Bulgarian party newspaper. And she was a red princess. And she stayed in the (inaudible) after the fall of the wall. And I remember once asking her in a setting rather like this how she could have stayed in the Bulgarian foreign ministry all the way through to ’91, and she said, “well, that’s where all the liberals were” and I said to her “yes, that’s what my friends in the KGB used to say, too—that they were all the liberals”. And this infuriated her. But I mean, that’s part of the problem, I think. I mean, she’s very, very anxious that she’s perceived as Russia’s candidate, and if the US perceives her that way, her candidacy might face difficulty.
The other person who might not make it, but Vesna Pusic I think is an interesting person who’s kind of an American, right? I mean, she’s a Croatian, but she’s spent a lot of time in America, and Americans like her, and if the Russians like her maybe it’s something that can work out. I mean she’s very talented, very smart... but what fascinates me really is what is the Security Council? Britain could veto somebody too, that’s for sure, and so could France, but China never vetoes anybody much, and I don’t think would get too worried about it, because it would come from Eastern Europe. But I do think — I hope — that part of the consideration is the mess that the UN is in and the challenges in front of it and that the person, whoever it is, can help meet those challenges and articulate what the UN does and doesn’t do — something, I think, Ban tried but was not very good at doing, I would say. I mean, he seemed very ineffective as a public presence. He may have been very good behind the scenes, but I’m hoping that we end up with someone who’s a little more media-savvy, and strongly articulate in languages — when you read Ban’s speeches they’re actually okay, but when you listen to them you want to kill yourself. And I mean no disrespect to him, who I do admire, but in terms of the mess in the world, the immigration crisis, the budget crisis from (inaudible), the Israel-Palestine crisis, the World Health Organization dealing with Zika, Ebola—I mean, the UN does an enormous amount with not enough money and not enough people and peacekeeping in particular seems to be (inaudible) between tragedy and scandal. And I mean I’m hopeful that the next secretary-general, wherever she’s from, will come to grips with the need to tell the world and to convince the world that this is an institution that actually matter and can function and can be more efficient and can (inaudible) in the world. So that’s what interests me, which will really be the play that’s going on between Russia and the United States which is basically in a lame duck period in terms of the administration while we have our own electoral drama going on, and I think I’ll just end it there. I mean, there’s this façade of public consultation going on, and I mean I think it’s important — it’s important that people go out and see- and I think it will be in the national interest. But there will be about three of the five permanent members that will dictate what happens at the end.

Lord Hannay:

Well thank you, Steven, that’s a fascinating view. The only thing, if I might, is that you said peacekeeping operations veer between I think you said tragedy and scandal, and that you can take the list through Libya, and El Salvador and Mozambique, Liberia, and so on — and the list of successes is long, and that everyone’s forgotten about it. But you’re quite right — the list of scandals and the list of failures is also quite long. That there are (inaudible) on to Natalie.

Natalie Samarasinghe:

Thank you so much, it’s a great pleasure to be here. I’m going to concentrate my remarks really on the selection process, offer a few comments on Russia’s performance on the Security Council, and then I’m going to try to make some suggestions on how the next secretary-general might tackle this dynamic. So as you might have heard this election process that’s currently unfolding in New York is brand new. For most of the UN’s history, the appointment took place behind closed doors, in the Security Council, dominated by the five permanent members, P5, even sometimes just by one or two as we’ve just heard, and subject to all sorts of wheeling and dealing and (inaudible). The process had nothing that you would expect from any basic recruitment process- no timetable, no job description, no list of candidates, no chance for the wider UN
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membership to hear from those candidates. Since the 1990s, there has been this tendency towards regional rotation, and of course we've heard that no woman has ever held the post. And so it is in our view a process not only unsuitable to finding the best possible candidate but hugely damaging to the UN which after all is an organization that promotes governance and advises countries on running elections.

The process instead was geared towards finding someone acceptable to the P5, which is of course a very important qualification for the job but we would argue not the only one. So the UNA UK along with its partners launched a campaign to improve the process, and working with about 150 supportive states at the UN and 200 million supporters worldwide we managed to make some headway at the UN last September when the general assembly adopted a resolution that included most but not all of our proposals. So we now have some very broad selection criteria, a rough timetable, a publication of candidates’ names and CVs (we actually know who these people are for the first time) and meetings with candidates involving all member states which we have tried to complement by hosting some public hustings debates. We held the first in April, in New York; the second will take place next week, so on the 3rd of June, in London.

So how did we get here? I think two factors contributed to the fact that we were able to make headway at all. I think first of all we tapped into the frustration that is felt within the wider UN membership. They’re simply side-lined by the Security Council. And with other UN reform efforts stagnating, I think the energy transferred to this process where they thought “oh, we can make headway”. And the fact that we were able to lobby and secure the support of UK, one of the P5 who’s also really important. And I think we tapped into the fact that the current relations of the P5 could lead to the lowest common denominator candidate emerging at a time when the UN really does need to work better. So most of the time when people talk about the UN working better, I think they mean that the Security Council should work better. So I think we need to remember that the Council can be deadlocked on an issue like Syria, but an agency like the UN food program can still go about doing their life-saving business. And we need to remember that the Council does for the most part function—so last year it adopted 63 resolutions, 60 unanimously, including 32 under chapter 7 of the charter which allows for enforcement action. Most of these resolutions were drafted by the UK and France. So when you actually look at the work of the council, look at who actually holds a pen and produces most of the drafts—I do think that is something that isn’t often mentioned.

It’s undeniable that the current strain of relations is having an impact on the Security Council and of course the wider UN system, most visibly through the lack of progress on Syria. I think my reading of Russia and the Council at the moment is that since the 2011 Resolution on Libya, which Russia has repeatedly presented as a continuation of Western disregard for international law, and the cost of going into Iraq, which is I think an interpretation that many states and commentators would agree with. Since then Russia has been trying with some success to position itself as the sort of crucial, indispensable player on the Security Council. It’s managed, particularly over Syria, to stall—without killing off—initiatives, sort of making the rest of the Council reliant on its good will. It now sort of has the power, then, to make concessions; it usually does so just before it extracts its pound of flesh, so we had made some progress on an ISIL resolution before Russia tried to push through a resolution on the MINSK agreement. And it likes to come through from time to time— though not always, it is true—to support the MINSK agreement. And it also quite successfully managed to certainly over Syria make the Security Council process effectively a discussion between the US and Russia. So it sort of bilateralised this multi-lateral organ. I think it’s always been the case that progress on areas of big-power interest, whether it be the Balkans or Israel-Palestine, has been hard to achieve. If you look at vetoes, you
have I think 10 Russian vetoes to three US vetoes in the last decade, but ten US vetoes to 1 Russian veto in
the previous decade. But I think the current situation is having an impact beyond the sort of narrow or
national interests of the P5. We’ve seen China with Russia blocking Council action on Burundi and arguing
against sanctions on conflict in South Sudan, so it is sort of having an impact.

What could the next secretary-general do to improve the situation? I think there have been great calls for a
strong leader, someone who’s capable of standing up to states, but in the past (inaudible) Secretary-General
managed to win praise from the wider world but alienated great powers in doing so, whereas in fact (inaudible)’s diplomacy is credited with (inaudible) the Cuban Missile Crisis. So I think we need a mix of
both of these extremes. Someone who is able to speak up when necessary, with enough clout to be listened
to, and this is where I think breaking with the tradition of a sort of quiet foreign minister from a smaller state
might actually be a good thing this time around.

But someone who uses the bully pulpit sparingly. Of course in 2016 the Secretary-General needs to be a
good communicator but it doesn’t always have to be her or him who is making the bold statements—there are
other UN officials as well, and I think it’s a case of making those comments on the day-to-day human rights
situations in a way that doesn’t always put the spotlight on the secretary-general, who I think should focus on
violations of the charter, atrocities, genocide, etc. I think we’ll need someone who will put a lot of emphasis
on peace and security; someone who will make use of the power to refer situations to the Security Council
the power that the secretary general has that not even other inter-governmental agencies like the Human
Rights Council has, but will also put in the work behind the scenes; investing in mediation, attending council
meetings, meeting with the individual members of the Council, and effectively becoming an advisor to the
UN states. That’s something that was originally included in the 1945 job description for the role, but that job
description was never adopted. I also hope the next secretary general will proactively encourage and support
initiatives like the E3+3 for Iran, which had the benefit of taking place outside of the Council and involving
states like Germany that have a very different relationship with Russia.

So can the new process support the appointment of such a person? Well, it requires candidates to appeal to
the wider UN membership as well as the P5 which I think is a good test and a good practice of how they will
keep these different constituencies on side. Having a broader base of support could also strengthen the hand
of the next incumbent. UNA-UK is pushing for two further improvements that we think would make a big
difference. First, an end to deal-making of other senior appointments, which would strengthen the secretary-
general’s team as a whole. And then a non-renewable term of office, which would strengthen the secretary-
general’s ability to pursue a more political and independent agenda. Of course, it is the Security Council that
will ultimately still make the decision. But I think that the new process has raised the cost of them making a
poor appointment because so many states are invested in this new process. And it’s been interesting to see
after the debates in New York with candidates how the P5 has been using what has been interpreted as good
or bad performances to push their own agenda. So I don’t think the process is going to be ignored by any
means. And it is, as David said, in the interest of Russia and the US to have a functioning UN which in
general is needed. For Russia, to maintain its international influence and the US, at least this administration
to share the burden of managing global problems. I think it’s interesting that neither Russia nor the US
thought to block the general assembly from instituting the new process—and they’ve engaged with it, perhaps
seeing it as an example to demonstrate that they can accept reform, without giving away any power, thereby
improving confidence in the system that already serves their interests. I think I’ll end on that note.
Lord Hannay:

Well, thank you. You’ve got a lot of wisdom there. If I could just add one little thing before we engage, because I have a feeling that this issue about rotation is quite difficult to understand. You can have rotation without having regional pre-emption. Just to illustrate that, if you wanted to achieve rotation in the 2016 appointment without having regional pre-emption, that would mean that you would have to choose either an Eastern European who’s never had it or a West European who last had it – from Amsterdam, 1982, or a Latin American, who last had it (inaudible). 1991 I think it was. So you could choose from those three. Obviously if you chose from an African or an Asian, you’d be making nonsense of this form of rotation, because they’ve been holding the office since then. You can achieve rotation other than by starting at the beginning of the process and saying “we’re going to veto anyone who’s not an Eastern European or an Asian”.

I just add that by way of clarification, because it is a tangled web. So now, who’d like to ask any questions--?

Yes, in the back there.

Question 1:

I’d just like to ask Steven—you say Russia was anxious to preserve its status in the United Nations. Do you think it could best do that by exercising or reframing its role (somewhat inaudible)?

Steven Erlanger:

It’s very hard to get into their heads. But I don’t think that’s a choice that they think about—I think they think they have it. And they’ll exercise it from moment to moment as they see fit. I mean, I thought Natalie explained quite well the problem in Libya, and the way they’ve felt since. And also, we know that they’re very unhappy with the LSCE which has been after them for the last ten years, mostly on electoral matters. So I’m not sure I have an answer. I mean, I know what might be most effective but that doesn’t mean Putin and his team would consider that.

Question 1, continued:

Well I think that’s perhaps my question—what would be most effective, from a Russian point of view?

Steven Erlanger:

You know, bargaining works. I mean, when you see how they saved Obama’s bacon on Syria and chemical weapons—it was very clever. It earned them quite a lot of respect, and it worked very very well. And personally, I didn’t even bring up Syria because it upsets me so much. The way it’s all been sort of blocked by Russia and its fear of regime change of any kind of any kind at the UN is probably the best answer of how they will proceed when they see their real national interests at stake. They’re going to do what they’re going to do.
**Lord Hannay:**

I would add, I think there is a kind of fascination in a country in Russia’s position with the wielding of a veto. It makes them feel good. It’s a phenomenon not unknown in this country when it comes to talk about the European Union. And it’s astonishing how good they feel. The first post-Cold War veto the Russians wielded was over the financing of the peacekeeping operation in Cyprus, where they vetoed a proposal which I’d carefully put together for transferring the costs from the UK which was bearing (inaudible) all of it, to the peacekeeping budget. They vetoed that just to show that they were still there, because a week later they voted for a solution that was almost identical to the one they vetoed. So, it was no doubt at all what they were trying to do. Now, it is conceivable, it is conceivable, that this kind of allure of a veto—but just remember another thing; you don’t need to veto just anything, with about 9 people voting in favour of it. So first you’ve got to winnow out a number of these candidates before you’re even going to get to this situation. Who’s next that would like to ask—yes, please.

**Question 2:**

I have a question about the non-permanent members of the Security Council. Do they have any significant say in this selection that (inaudible)?

**Lord Hannay:**

Natalie, why don’t you get that one.

**Natalie Samarasinghe:**

Well, I think that Lord Hannay’s point is very valuable. The P5 can block, but they cannot (inaudible) without the other 9. I think the E10 have been quite active, and we’ve seen changes since we’ve been working on this process for instituting a better process. And they’re quite keen now that there’s a transition between what’s been happening at the general assembly and what will be happening next month if France has its way at the Security Council. So, for example, Malaysia, or New Zealand which is now in this rather difficult position because they have a candidate and have been pushing for closed-door meetings with all members of the Security Council. And there’s certainly a few states on the Security Council at the moment to make progress in terms of getting some of the other reforms out, particularly on the single term. And they’re also working closely with the “Act” group, which is a sort of reform-minded group, on what will happen if a candidate who isn’t acceptable to the general assembly, is put forward. And I think that will happen you know, I think we will end up with a US vs. Russia (inaudible) and a compromise. And that compromise will hopefully be acceptable and good enough for the wider UN membership because there are those states that are saying, “if that candidate isn’t good enough, and hasn’t gone through the process, maybe we will send the choice back, or ask for a further”—I don’t think that will be very good for the UN system. I think that it would result in quite a lot of turmoil and upset. But there are certainly states that feel strongly enough about this whole process to be willing to take that kind of action. But of course, as ever, a consensual decision is preferable.
Lord Hannay:

David, do you have anything to add before we...?

David Clark:

Yes. So I think the non-permanent members do have an influence, and more so since the system (inaudible) was introduced during the 1990s. The non-permanent members—along with the permanent members—can indicate preference for who they think should go forward for consideration to another meeting. So they get a chance, not individually but even collectively, if they think a candidate isn’t right, they have the opportunity to register their disapproval, and potentially prevent that candidate from going through to the next round. They don’t have a veto, but they have a factor in this.

Lord Hannay:

Next question, anybody who’d like to...

Question 2:

Do any of you on the panel think the Russians would accept a non-East European?

Lord Hannay:

Why don’t you go first on that?

Natalie Samarasinghe:

It’s interesting that they haven’t been as vociferous about it as the Chinese were last time around when they made it very clear that they would veto anyone who’s not Asian. I’m not sure it will come to that. The compromise will most likely end up being someone from that region. Unless all of those people are deemed to do very, very badly or something comes out about their past records. But I think that a lot of work is being done to make sure that it doesn’t come to that. However, there is a lot of disagreement on who the compromise candidates are or could be. I’m afraid I’m a bit hamstrung because I’m not really allowed to comment in any way on the person that (inaudible) just because our campaign is focused on the process. But if you want my view, I don’t think it will come to that.

David Clark:

My understanding—it was interesting what Steven said during his presentation. It’s my understanding that Russia doesn’t have a candidate as such and that there is disagreement within the Russian government about
who would be best for them. So their advocacy with Eastern Europe isn’t because they have a particular Eastern European necessarily in mind; it’s because they believe that it would suit Russia in repairing its relations with other countries in the region to have an Eastern European and to be seen as a good team player. I will also add that, just in relation to Irina Bokova, it would be a great shame if her candidacy was stopped on the basis of a suspicion. There’s nothing in Irina Bokova’s record, politically, since the end of communism to suggest that she is suspect in any way. Quite the contrary; if anyone has a reason to object to her political record, it’s Russia, because she was a strong and passionate advocate of Bulgaria’s Euro-Atlantic integration—its path to the EU and to NATO. And the one thing I think people do draw attention to is the fact that she knows Russia; she studied in Moscow, she speaks Russian fluently. But if you go down the route now, I think considering people suspect because they understand Russia, then we’re losing the plot. We need people who understand Russia. This could be a potential point of connection.

Steven Erlanger:

Well, I want to say that you’re right, but I also want to say the suspicion is there, and she’s very anxious about it. And she feels like it’s an (inaudible). That’s her problem. And I don’t know if it’s true or not; (inaudible); I don’t know what else to tell her. But you know, I’m always curious about (inaudible) you know, the Bulgarian who’s the commissioner. Who’s terrific, I think — she’s really, really funny, and smart and has done a wonderful job with her jobs there. But my guess is that she’s (inaudible) that the Russians would probably not favor because of her view, involvement, and her closeness to the Westerners. But you know, if you’re a Security Council member it’s good to have somebody that you can work with, but you know the veto’s more important than whoever fills the job, it seems to me. So I think there is room for compromise, and probably room for Russia to show that it’s acting in the interests, as David said, of the region and world peace and so on. Yes. I don’t think it’s that hard a call.

Lord Hannay:

I mean, I don’t know how they construct advice in the Russian foreign ministry, and I don’t (inaudible) but if I was giving advice in those circumstances, one of the factors I would say is ‘do we really want an Eastern European who will spend 10 years proving that they’re not a stooge of the Russians?’ You know, it’s a two-edged sword. But they probably very possibly don’t think that way or don’t offer advice of that kind. They possibly don’t think that way or don’t offer advice of that kind. (Inaudible).

Question 2, continued:

So you think they could accept a non-East-European?

Lord Hannay:

Well, I think we’ll have to wait and see. I think the jury’s out, but they’re unpredictable. It’s very difficult to foretell decision-making when the decisions are taken by one person. And that’s the situation we’re in in
Russia, and have been in for quite some years now since Medvedev handed back the power to Putin. And it is very difficult because it’s quite clear that these positions are taken by one person. Not by a group, or a collective, or a parliamentary assembly, or anything like that. So it’s really anyone’s guess.

**Natalie Samarasinghe:**

I just have to add, I do slightly disagree one of David’s reasons, that they might want an Eastern European so that the Secretary-General could play a stronger role in Europe. I mean I don’t think Ban was side-lined in Ukraine for lack of trying; he went there, he sent envoys there, I just think Russians didn’t want him to act. And I’m not sure Russians would accept any Secretary-General acting in a situation like that unless it was someone who really would toe that line, if I’m honest. And I think one of their strongest considerations in pushing for Eastern Europe is just because it is UN convention and they tend to stick to the rules and conventions that are there. That’s sort of their role. So I think that it’s that sort of consideration that might be important to them, rather than the actions that an S-G could take in the future.

**Lord Hannay:**

Right. More time for more questions?

**Question 3:**

Lord Hannay, you mentioned in the introduction that we were heading into a sort of quasi-Cold War situation, which obviously could potentially be really worrying. I really just wondered if any members of the panel could say what prospects they think there are for a new Secretary-General trying to diffuse the potential dangers of that situation.

**Lord Hannay:**

Yeah, let’s have another one.

**Question 4:**

There’s been a rumour during the rounds which personally I think is completely mad, but I wonder what you thought of it: that the Russians have a Plan B, which is that they will stall and try to get the job passed under Merkel which would kill two birds with one stone—it would get her out of the chancellorship of Germany and the leadership of the EU, and at the same time put her in a job which would maybe be useful to Russia.

**Lord Hannay:**

It sounds like a New York story to me. (Laughter.) Who would like to start? Steven?
Steven Erlanger:

I’d like to see Woody Allen make that a movie. (Laughter.)

I mean I’ve heard—there’s been a lot of talk about Merkel. I think it sort of stems from a period where she was at her weakest. I don’t think she’s quite as weak as she was. I think she’s exercised a degree of control now over the migration crisis. Whereas before I thought she wouldn’t run again, now I think she will, in Germany. So I don’t put much more stock in that—in Germany, it’s like Thatcher a bit, it’s kind of a (inaudible) situation, there really is no alternative. And unless she suddenly gets sick or something, I think she’ll stay.

In terms of your question, I honestly don’t know. I think when, as you say, you’re dealing with a form of dictatorship, then I think personal relationships actually matter, frankly. And if we could have a degree of trust in a new Secretary-General, I think it could make a tremendous amount of difference.

David Clark:

Yes. I think ultimately the effectiveness of a Secretary-General mediating between the permanent members depends largely on the extent to which the permanent members and themselves have come to the conclusion that they want to de-escalate. If you’re in an escalatory context, as we’ve seen with Ban Ki-Moon’s efforts, which I acknowledge to try to interpose himself in the Ukraine crisis, it’s very difficult to do so if the permanent members don’t want you to be involved, because they have the capacity for shock value to veto any initiative that you put forward. So it depends on the right dynamic being there. If the right dynamic is there, and the Secretary-General is with the grain of events, then they can be very effective.

Just on the other question of Mary’s mad theory, mad rumor, it doesn’t add up to me at all. If there’s a Russian interest in getting Angela Merkel out of Germany and out of the Chancellor’s office, it’s because she has been—in comparison to the rest of the German elite—quite robust in standing up to them. Why remove one enemy from a senior job only to put them in another senior job? I think if he wants her out, he wants her to go into retirement, not somewhere else where she could potentially damage their interests. So it doesn’t really make sense, that theory.

Natalie Samarasinghe:

It’s interesting. The rumours just don’t go away, and they’re mentioned by diplomats all the time, so I suppose I agree. I just don’t see it personally; people actually wanting to manoeuvre you out of your national context is a particularly strong platform on which to take a UN role. And I haven’t really heard from anyone in Germany who thinks this is a credible rumour. But, like I said, it’s not going away.

On Martin’s question, I think that I agree with both David and Steven. It’s personal relationships that could make a difference, bearing in mind that the S-G’s influence will always be limited. That’s why I was trying to make comments about the communicative, inspirational leader on the one hand and the person who can actually sit down, and have a very effective quiet word behind the scenes. I think we need both, and I’m not sure we will get that in either leader necessarily, or that one person should or could do both at a time. Because I think one role necessarily undermines the other. So I think it depends on what we want from our next
Secretary-General. If we want the visionary, inspiring leader, then we’ll have to make a very choice—I say we, I mean the P5—will have to make a very different choice than if they want someone who can be the effective mediator; someone who can hopefully calm down the big-power tensions that have emerged over the last few years.

**Lord Hannay:**

But, if I may pursue this hobby horse of mine, it is frankly a simple waste of time saying “we might have a Cold War situation”. We have had one for two years now. And there’s no point (inaudible)—it’s a partial Cold War situation. It isn’t the total Cold War situation that you had after 1990, where every single issue around the world was discussed in terms of the proxy of one side or the other. That we do not have. Because all though there’s some trouble, difficulties in Africa, there are not visceral difficulties of the same sort. But we do have in the Ukraine, over Crimea, in Syria, and—forget it not—in the South China Sea, effectively a Cold War situation. Now, I would hope that a new Secretary-General would be able to roll that envelope a little bit back. Not the whole way—don’t kid yourself—but roll it back a bit, because otherwise the risk is that it will unroll itself further, and start to draw in other parts of the world. So I think that is a real task for the new Secretary-General, but don’t—I would argue—give him or her an impossible task, and certainly don’t say “you’re there to prevent a Cold War situation”. The Cold War situation’s there. They’re there to try and attenuate it. That, I feel, is a really major task. And it will be really difficult to do. And probably the South China Sea’s even more difficult to do than Ukraine or Crimea. But you’ll see when the arbitration court ruling on the Philippine case, just how the Chinese react and what the consequences are in that area, but they could be pretty bad.

Anyway, does anybody have an urgent need for another question? Because I assume we can just about squeeze one in. But if not, thank you all for coming along. I think I’d like to thank our three panelists who were absolutely brilliant, who taught me and I think a lot of others around the table a lot more than they knew. And I suspect you’ll be hearing quite a lot about this once the 23rd of June has passed.